

Action group in bid to aid jobless

HONGKONG'S first bureau to deal with the fast-growing problem of unemployment has been formed to search for more remedies and to press the Government to do more.

The Action Group on Unemployment, which is made up of social workers, students and other people, is still in its infancy but plans to register properly as a voluntary organisation.

A spokesman for the group yesterday gave a run-down of the initial works:

- To lobby for the creation of more job opportunities for young unemployed in the coming Summer Youth Programme which taps more than \$2 million from the Government and the Jockey Club annually.

- To press for a lowering of criteria for public assistance so that more people can benefit from the scheme.

- To explore the many problems hawkers face and act as an agent where hawkers can make their complaints.

He explained that both voluntary agencies and the

Social Welfare Department hire considerable outsiders, mainly students, to help them run numerous projects during the two-month Summer Youth Programme.

He said that the group would try to persuade agencies to hire jobless youths as far as possible so that they could at least have some pocket money for the transitional period.

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Jobless youths should also be encouraged to take part in the programme, especially in training courses and work camps, so that they could be occupied.

On the question of public assistance, he said not many unemployed are entitled to this either because they are too young or too healthy.

He said the group believes more people could be benefit from the scheme if its criteria, such as age limits, could be lowered or made more flexible.

Hawking is one of the decent ways to beat

unemployment and the Government awareness of the ever-increasing number of hawkers is clearly demonstrated by the move to open 15 streets to them, he said.

He said the group has already approached some hawkers and found that not only are there many engaging in an unthinkable variety of merchandises, but also have no where to turn to have a complaint thoroughly looked into.

The group hopes to emerge as a mediator to take hawkers' complaints to the various authorities.

The group now has more than 30 active members.

Meanwhile, the Christian Industrial Committee has announced a special project called "Venture Against Unemployment" to be launched this year.

It hopes to help tackle the unemployment problem by encouraging social welfare agencies to launch various direct service and counselling programmes and lobby for the expansion of the Labour Department's local employment service and existing cash assistance programmes.